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ABSTRACT

Intended primarily for Kentucky classroom teachers and administrators, this idea book first identifies three major issues that members of the Writing Advisory Committee felt should be addressed so that writing instruction will not suffer because of use of the writing portfolio. The broad issues emphasized in the idea book are for teachers to: (1) work with administrators, school-based council, and other teachers to encourage school and district support for quality writing instruction; (2) incorporate writing tasks into all subjects, making them a routine part of instruction; and (3) use technology in more efficient and effective ways. The idea book defines these issues more closely, with examples included, in its next two sections: "District/School Commitment for Successful Writing Program" and "Time Saving Strategies during the Writing Process." The resource suggestion section cites three Kentucky Department of Education materials and eight Kentucky Educational Television videos, as well as seven books used as workshop materials. (NKA)

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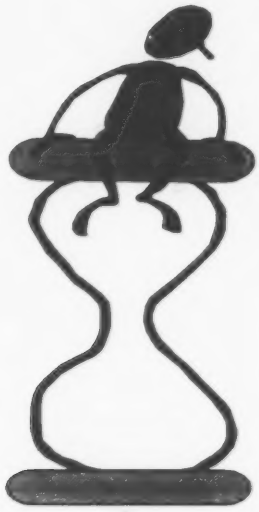

Saving Time with Writing Portfolios

An Idea Book for Administrators and Classroom Teachers

Kentucky Department of Education
Division of Curriculum Development
September 1998

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Saving Time with Writing Portfolios

Background

Kentucky teachers have been charged with implementing the most progressive reform effort in the nation. Teachers have worked closely and successfully with many aspects of reform, but perhaps they have experienced their greatest challenges with the writing assessment called for by the Kentucky Education Reform Act. Writing portfolios, which included new kinds of writing for schools and were judged by initially unfamiliar criteria, posed new challenges for classroom teachers. Although Kentucky teachers generally agree that writing has dramatically improved among their students, they also express great concern over the amount of time that writing instruction takes in their classrooms. Seeking to help their students do good work and meet the state's requirements for the writing portfolio, teachers are interested in finding ways to use their time efficiently.

Many experienced teachers know how to implement writing instruction that does not take away from the time spent on teaching the basic skills and content of their grade level or subject. They know that many kinds of classroom writing can fit into their instruction and can help students reach all KERA goals. These teachers recognize that writing in any content area can be used as a tool for learning, rather than just an "add-on" to the load of teachers and students. Many teachers have adopted time-efficient practices; however, other teachers still need support. School administrators, too, can take useful steps to help teachers and students.

Members of the Writing Advisory Committee, experienced teachers from elementary, middle, and high schools in every region of the state, have identified three major issues which need to be addressed so instruction will not suffer because of the writing portfolio. Two of the issues, integrating writing tasks into regular instruction and using technology more efficiently, refer to classroom instruction; one of the items refers to school and district support for the classroom teacher.

Broad Issues

Teachers on the Writing Advisory Committee have identified the following as the most important considerations for classroom teachers as they work toward implementing "time-saving" strategies with writing portfolios:

✓ **Work with administrators, school-based council, and other teachers to encourage school and district support for quality writing instruction.** Many of the most effective time-saving strategies require understanding, effort, and coordination from administrators, school councils, and other staff members. Teachers and students at grades 4, 7, and 12 can save time with writing portfolios if the school community works together to establish a quality school writing program.

✓ **Incorporate writing tasks into all subjects, making them a routine part of instruction.** Teachers can save time when they incorporate writing-to-learn, open-response questions, on-demand writing prompts, and real-world writings into the instructional unit. Integrating writing activities into the instructional unit serves the goal of helping students learn core content and achieve all other KERA goals (e.g., gain communication skills, thinking and problem-solving skills, self-sufficiency, group membership skills, and integration skills). In addition, writing activities can serve as "seeds" for topics and purposes that students can use in their real-world pieces that may be placed in the portfolio. These strategies promote integrated instruction:

- Use writings-to-learn (learning logs, admit slips, and response journals) that increase learning in all content areas.
- Develop a clearer understanding of the categories of writing required in the portfolio (reflective, personal, literary, and transactive) and what category might be most appropriate in a given subject area.
- Use instructional reading material as models for student writing. Teachers save time when students are already familiar with the kinds of writing that they are asked to produce.
- Learn various ways to enhance idea development and support. Teachers save time when they know **specific** ways to help students develop and support their ideas.

✓ **Use technology in more efficient and effective ways.**
Students and teachers save time if students are not required to type all pieces for the portfolio. Typing or word processing is not a state requirement. If students use technology in the development of their writing, they should be familiar with word processing, how to research topics on the internet, and how to download information that might be useful to them in the preparation of a portfolio piece. Students should use computers throughout the composing process, not simply for keying in the final draft of their pieces.

These broad issues are more closely defined, with examples included, in the two following sections: "District School Commitment for Successful Writing Program" and "Time Saving Strategies During the Writing Process."

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District/School Commitment for Successful Writing Program

When districts and schools invest time in planning successful writing instruction and supporting teachers in their professional development, this investment will not only provide benefits to teachers and students, it will save time in the future. **Research conducted by Appalachia Educational Laboratory in collaboration with the Kentucky Department of Education has shown that the most significant factor contributing to a successful writing program is district/administrative support.** The following key elements to assure successful student writing are the responsibilities of district personnel, principals and other school administrators, and school-based councils:

1) **Support and assist teachers from all disciplines in establishing a writing plan** that emphasizes writing as a basic building block of the curriculum and establishes a close connection to *The Program of Studies*.

- **Establish a policy requiring school-wide contribution to the writing portfolio.** Such a policy can reduce the load for portfolio development which one or two teachers may be carrying.
- **Develop non-accountability portfolios, or working folders, that follow students each year.** Such a policy provides writing instruction for students at all levels and diminishes the time and effort spent at accountability grades.
- **Encourage and support yearly portfolio reviews to determine strengths and needs of the school writing program.** School plans based on evidence from student writing can save time and energy spent on unfocused instruction.
- **Provide writing instruction at each grade level for all four types of writing required in the Kentucky writing portfolio.** In some schools, all teachers at all grades will concentrate on personal writing when a better plan would be to provide instruction and practice on reflective, personal, literary, and transactive writing at all grade levels.
- **Use ESS time to improve writing skills.** ESS instruction in writing can support and reinforce classroom instruction, especially for students who need more individual teacher attention in writing instruction.
- **Train and use parent/community volunteers to help reduce teacher time with student conferences.**

2) **Require and support professional development for all teachers** in the following areas:

- **Categories and forms of writing required for the writing portfolio so that students and teachers do not waste time developing ineffective pieces for inclusion in the portfolio.**
- **Instructional units and ways to integrate writing into the unit of study so that writing will not be seen as an "add-on" which takes time away from teaching the content.**

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- **Integrated collaborative units.** One example at the high school level would be collaboration by an American History teacher and an English teacher on designing a unit which integrates history and literature around a certain theme. Integration of writing into the unit would be a natural outgrowth of the collaboration.
- **Time management for the classroom teacher.**
- **Appropriate and ethical response to student writing.**
- **Transactive writing for content area teachers.**

Regional Writing Consultants, classroom teachers experienced in writing instruction, often provide regional training as well as school and district professional development, and their services are free to any Kentucky public school or district. Contact your regional service center for more information.

3) **Establish a policy requiring portfolio completion for promotion or graduation**. Student effort and "buy in" are key to successful student results and may cause teachers to spend less time convincing students to complete writing assignments throughout the school year. (***School boards and school-based councils that establish this kind of policy must insure that teachers are provided the support and professional development described in this document.*** Students must be assured quality writing instruction, and teachers must have proper support for providing that instruction, before students can be held accountable for their work. Schools with promotion or graduation policies should make provisions for periodic feedback to students on their writing progress. Several Kentucky schools and districts have developed portfolio requirement policies.)

4) **Develop a plan for compiling and storing portfolios and/or working folders**. In some schools the portfolios are stored with the homeroom teacher, in the English teacher's room, the library, or even the teacher's lounge. An organized plan can save time and confusion when portfolios are put together for final scoring.

5) **Develop a plan for checking that all students have completed portfolios.** In some schools, teachers and students use an assembly-line approach to guarantee that each student has included the required number of pieces in each category. This approach involves a system for counting number of pieces in each portfolio and for checking information on the Table of Contents. Typically, this simple plan assigns different tasks to each person on the "assembly line" and can cut down on time spent by one or two teachers who have shouldered the entire responsibility of checking portfolio contents and Tables of Contents.

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6) **Develop and support a plan to insure that all new teachers receive introductory professional development in writing.** When new teachers do not understand basic writing portfolio requirements and criteria for scoring, they may use their instructional time teaching writing in an unproductive manner.

7) **Establish policies that support scorers and insure quality control during portfolio scoring sessions.** Many districts have implemented policies like those listed below. However, in some districts, teachers must use their personal time to train for and score portfolios.

- **Set limits on the number of portfolios to be read per scorer.** KDE recommends a maximum of 24-30 portfolios per scorer per day. In addition, scorers need to read a sufficient number of portfolios to increase the likelihood of adequately scoring to the standard. KDE recommends a 12-15 portfolio minimum for each scorer.
- **Include teachers from several content areas and/or grades on the scoring team.**
- **Provide sufficient time for scoring training.**
- **Provide sufficient time and a quiet place for scoring session(s).**
- **Include time for reading and discussion of quality control portfolios during scoring session.**

Additional Suggestions

8) **Promote teaching English/language arts in an integrated manner**. When reading, writing, and grammar are taught in isolation, the application of those skills is sometimes unclear to students. These important skills are not the central focus of an entire class; they are part of the larger picture—learning to communicate clearly. (See 1998 *Program of Studies*)

9) **Provide a full time writing resource teacher** whose responsibilities may include but are not limited to the following:

- **Contribute time-saving techniques for teachers.**
- **Mentor new teachers in writing instruction.**
- **Train parent/community volunteers to assist classroom teachers with student conferences.**
- **Model lessons which demonstrate time-saving strategies in classrooms throughout the school.**

10) **Limit class size** for teachers bearing greatest responsibility for writing instruction and portfolio development. (National Council for Teachers of English recommends 20 students or fewer per class for successful learning.)

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Time-Saving Strategies During the Writing Process

Experienced writing teachers use time-saving strategies so that the development of a written piece is not considered a burden, but rather a tool to increase learning in the classroom. Tried and true time-saving techniques are often tied to teaching and implementing the writing process -- the series of steps, formal and informal, used by real writers as they work through a piece of writing. The members of Kentucky's Writing Advisory Committee compiled this list of strategies to help teachers save time at each stage of the writing process.

1) **Prewriting** - Prewriting is a series of strategies meant to assist writers with designing tasks, gathering, and organizing thoughts or information. Students who approach the writing task with more clarity will not waste so much time starting and completing the first draft. **Better use of prewriting time reduces the time spent on the piece of writing at all other stages of the writing process.** Suggested time-saving strategies include the following:

- **Choose readings that represent the kinds of writing the students are asked to include in the portfolio.** For example, when elementary students read "how-to" articles provided in the reading textbook, science textbook, or content area magazine, the teacher points out the characteristics of that kind of writing so the students will become familiar with that format. The teacher makes the reading or science lesson do "double duty" by providing instruction in the content as well as in writing. This strategy can be used in any content area at any grade level: reading for content and examining characteristics of editorials in a middle school social studies class or reading for content and examining characteristics of articles in a science journal for high school biology.
- **Help student writers design the writing task.** In other words, help students determine the audience, the form, and the purposes for which they will write before they begin work on the piece. Use Dr. Charles Whitaker's technique, "slicing the pie," to help students find a topic. Have students fill in the blanks of the following sentence provided by Dr. Whitaker to frame and focus the writing task: *As a (writer's role) I am writing a (form) for (reader audience) to (purpose).* Example: As a concerned student I am writing a letter to the school-based council to persuade them to purchase new playground equipment for our school. Helping students find a focus before writing begins will cut down on time spent with revision and conferencing later on. *Contact Kentucky Writing Program at KDE to obtain information on "slicing the pie."*
- **Model the actual assignment with the class so that students have a clear idea of how to go about developing the writing that has been assigned.** This approach can save valuable time after students begin work on the assignment because more students are likely to have a clearer idea about how to approach the task, and fewer students will need individual attention during drafting.
- **Teach reader awareness strategies to students.** Point out examples of "reader awareness" when reading interesting material in any classroom. Show

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students how the writer uses an interesting lead or introduction; focuses on one or two ideas and supports them with clear examples, personal stories, comparisons, or statistics; provides a "road map" for the reader with organization and/or formatting; employs correct grammar and mechanics to help the reader move easily through the piece; and ends with a satisfying conclusion.

- **Teach mini-lessons that demonstrate skills needed in order to complete the assignment.** For example, if students are writing fiction, the teacher presents lessons about plot, character development, setting, punctuating dialogue, as well as vocabulary, and spelling of transition words used in sequential organization. This approach saves time for the teacher since basic skills and writing instruction are taught at the same time.
- **Teach organizing strategies such as listing, webbing, and clustering and idea development strategies such as snapshots, exploding the moment, and thought shots to help students clarify, not only what they want to write, but also how they'll develop and organize their ideas and information.** *Read After the End by Barry Lane to learn about "snapshots, exploding the moment, and thought shots." (Cited in "Resources" section of this document)*
- **Teach students specific ways to develop and support ideas (e.g., facts, examples, statistics, graphs, and narrative).** *Ask Cluster Leader to share information from 1998 Summer Cluster Leader Institute or invite regional writing consultant to provide school or district training on developing and supporting ideas.*

2) **Drafting** - Composing or drafting is the process of getting thoughts on paper. Time reduction strategies for teachers and students include these ideas:

- **Compose on a computer (rather than use the computer for the final draft only)--if students have keyboarding skills.** When students possess the keyboarding skill to compose on the computer, much time can be saved at the revising and editing stages of the writing process since students do not have to recopy their work.
- **Assign the first draft for homework--with completed first draft due on a certain date.**
- **Require students to write on every other line when drafting by hand so they will have room to add to and rewrite sections at the revision stage.** Students save time when they do not have to recopy the entire piece during revision.

3) **Conferencing** - Conferencing is the time teachers, peers, paraprofessionals, parents, and other community members spend responding to student writing. Teacher time spent during conferencing can be reduced when teachers do the following:

- **Limit oral and written responses, concentrating on responding to the purposes of the writer and on the needs of the reader.** Look for patterns in the student's writing and concentrate on the most critical issues for

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the writer—not every mistake in every line. When conferences focus entirely on the problems in the piece of writing and pay little attention to improving the skills of the writer, they are unproductive for the student and the teacher. *If the student is rewriting a piece multiple times and learning has stopped, the teacher has "over conferenced" with that student.*

- **Teach students to be good responders, focusing on specific parts of the writing.** Do this by modeling conferences with the whole class. In addition, provide conference/response forms with directions for students to use when conferencing with peers. (For example: *(1) Ask the writer to tell you what to listen for when he she reads the paper aloud to you. (2) Tell the writer which part of the paper was the clearest or best part. (3) Write down 2 or 3 questions you still have after hearing or reading the paper. (4) Give the writer suggestions for making the paper clearer or more interesting for the reader.*) When students possess conferencing skills and use them with their peers, teachers cut down on the number of individual conferences they have to schedule. In addition, students increase their knowledge of writing criteria when they have been taught what to look for during a writing conference with their peers.
- **Train and use other teachers, paraprofessionals, and other community members to respond to student writing while adhering to the "Code of Ethics."**

4) **Revising -** Revision is the time spent focusing on the further development of ideas and insuring that the needs of the reader have been met. **Teachers can save the most time at the revision stage by spending quality time at the prewriting stage of the process.** (See suggestions under "Prewriting" section of this document.) Time saving strategies include the following:

- **Avoid unnecessary recopying.** (See suggestions listed above under "Drafting.")
- **Avoid line-by-line revision.** (See suggestions under "Conferencing.")
- **Provide specific feedback like *Focus on your favorite part of the trip rather than telling everything that happened* so that students will save time by going right to the problem when they rework their pieces of writing.** Do not return papers which include general teacher comments like *Needs to be better, More detail needed, Good job.*
- **Use "guided" revision aligned with skills and lessons which have been taught recently.** For example, to reinforce a lesson about remaining focused on a purpose, ask students to revise their own or others' papers by highlighting the stated or implied purpose(s) and all details which support the purpose(s). Then ask students to mark sections, with a different colored highlighter, which do not support the purpose and perhaps do not belong in the paper.
- **Teach specific revision strategies such as ARMS (*Add, Remove, Move, Substitute*).**

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5) **Editing** - Editing is the process of proofreading a piece of writing to insure that it is as free from errors as possible. **Teachers should understand that not every piece of writing needs to be edited.** Those pieces that will be published, shown on the wall, sent out to the community, or placed in the portfolio will need to be edited. To reduce time spent in editing teachers can do the following:

- **Evaluate student writing to determine critical skills that need to be taught and design classroom, small group, and individual skill lessons around the needs of the students.** For example, devoting large amounts of classroom time to identifying parts of speech may not be as productive as teaching ways to identify and correct run-on sentences in one's own writing. Identifying and teaching critical skills is a more productive use of time than following the format of the English textbook.
- **Concentrate on one or two skills when marking student papers.** Marking every mistake can be time-consuming for the teacher and overwhelming to the student.
- **Train and use peers to assist one another with editing while staying within the ethical guidelines outlined in the "Code of Ethics."** Students can "learn by doing" when they learn to work together as "editors." Practice with editing can help students learn and apply the rules of correct grammar.
- **Teach specific editing strategies such as CUPS (*Capitalization, Usage, Punctuation, Sentences [or Spelling]*).**

6) **Publishing** - Publishing is the process of presenting the piece of writing to an audience other than the teacher. Teachers can save time at this part of the writing process by doing the following:

- **Do not insist that students type <u>all</u> pieces, especially in classes of younger writers who do not possess proficient keyboarding skills.** Typed pieces are not a requirement for the state portfolio.

A study by B. Dunn and D. Reay, published in the *Journal of Educational Research*, 82:237-245, reports that keyboarding produced higher quality texts when the students' keyboarding speed was faster than their handwriting speed. Their research also reported the converse to be true. When students' keyboarding speed was slower than their handwriting speed, they produced lower quality texts. (McCutchen, D. (1995). Cognitive processes in children's writing: developmental and individual differences. *Issues in Education*, 1:123-160.)

- **Ask students who are using computers to print <u>two</u> copies of their final drafts, one for their writing folder and one for inclusion in any planned publication (e.g., class booklet stapled together and placed in the bookshelf for all to read, bulletin board display in the hall, letter to a public official, or entry into a contest).** Printing two copies at the time of final printing can reduce time spent locating pieces and copying them for publication later on.
- **Require students to save copies to disk if they are using computers, and teach them the proper procedures for saving their work.** Consider implementing a plan to store individual diskettes in the classroom or computer lab—especially for younger students. This cuts down on "lost" pieces

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which have to be re-keyed when portfolios are being assembled.

- **Establish a procedure to photocopy handwritten pieces for the portfolio and use the original for publication.**

7) **Reflecting** - Reflecting is the time spent by the student analyzing his/her strengths in the writing, analyzing skills needed, and focusing on ways that the next piece of writing can be improved.

- **Provide opportunities for students to write reflections about their learning in all classes throughout all their years of school.** Have students write their reflections in classroom journals, learning logs, or observation notebooks that they keep for their class notes. At the end of a lesson or unit, provide questions to help students focus their reflections. (For example: What do you still have questions about or want to know more about? What was the most important learning that took place for you during this unit? Why does that seem so important?) Since the portfolio requirements specify a letter to the reviewer as the reflective piece, students can save valuable time when they compose this letter if they have practiced reflective writing throughout their school years.
- **Require students to fill out "reflection sheets" which are stapled to every final draft which has gone through the writing process and is being placed in the working portfolio/folder.** In some schools all teachers use a generic reflection sheet developed for all classes; in other schools teachers develop and use their own reflection sheets specific to the assignment. When students write informal reflections which are stapled to and saved with their final drafts, they save time when they are compiling portfolios and writing the Letter to the Reviewer. If reflection sheets ask students to note their strengths and improvements by providing specific examples from the piece of writing, they will be able to recall that information and include it more quickly and easily when they write the Letter to the Reviewer at a later time.

Resources

Kentucky Department of Education Materials:

Program of Studies for Kentucky Schools, Grades Primary - 12. Kentucky Department of Education, 1998. (See KDE web site: http:www.kde.state.ky.us)

Implementation Manual for the Program of Studies. Kentucky Department of Education, 1998. (See KDE web site: http:www.kde.state.ky.us)

"Steps to Follow When Teaching Any Genre" a KDE teaching module by Elizabeth Dick and Sharon Hatton (Contact Kentucky Writing Program, Kentucky Department of Education, Phone: 502-564-9853 or e-mail Claudia Runge, *crunge@kde.state.ky.us* or Julie Whitaker, *jwhitake@kde.state.ky.us*)

KET videos:

- Teaching Grammar While Teaching Writing (2 parts: Elementary and Secondary) 10/96
- Writing in the Content Areas (3-part series - 11/95)
- Writing Issues for Students with Special Needs 10/95

1997-98 Professional Development Series

- Technical Writing (3 parts) Science, Social Studies, Mathematics
- Special Writing Topics Featuring Model Teachers: Personal Writing, Feature Articles, Editorial Writing
- Primary Writing
- A Year in a High School Writing Class
- Student Lessons with Barry Lane

(Order from Kentucky Educational Television - phone: 1-800-432-0951)

Workshop Materials by Dr. Charles Whitaker, Eastern Kentucky University

Books:

Atwell, Nancie. *Coming to Know: Writing to Learn in the Intermediate Grades.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990.

Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle: New Understandings About Writing, Reading, and Learning.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.

Avery, Carol. *...And With a Light Touch: Learning About Reading, Writing, and Teaching with First Graders.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993.

Calkins, Lucy. *The Art of Teaching Writing.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986.

Freeman, Marcia S. *Listen to This: Developing an Ear for Expository.* Gainesville, FL: Maupin House Publishing, Inc., 1997.

Harvey, Stephanie. *Nonfiction Matters: Reading, Writing, and Research in Grades 3-8.* York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 1998.

Lane, Barry. *After the End.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993.